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A

LETTER

TO A

Member of Parliament

CONCERNING

Clandeſtine Trade.

Shewing how far the Evil Practices at the Cuſtom-houſe at *London* tend to the Encouragement of ſuch a Trade.

Written by a Fair Merchant.

LONDON,

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A LETTER TO A Member of Parliament CONCERNING Clandeſtine Trade.

SIR,

THAT the Trade of this Nation is the chief Support thereof, is viſible to any Perſon, that conſiders the vaſt Supplies which have been given to his Majeſty by Funds laid upon Trade during the War. And the great Importance of maintaining the Trade of the Nation neceſſarily follows upon the Conſideration of the

Premiſes, which cannot be done while the Fair Merchant is unfairly dealt with, and indeed the whole Affair of Commerce embaraſs'd throughout the whole Kingdom. The intrinſick Value of the Lands of this Realm will not defray the Charge of a long and expenſive War, without the Auxiliary Aſſiſtance of Merchants Traders, who are not only the Support of the Realm at ſuch a Juncture, but in times of Peace are the Support of the Civil Liſt, and their Stocks the Funds of his Majeſty's Revenue. His Majeſty is very ſenſible of the Advantage of Trade, who in his Gracious Speech to both Houſes of Parliament at the opening of this Seſſions was pleaſed to aſſure his People, he would make it his buſineſs to encourage it, and as an advantage to it, propos'd the preparing of ſome good Bill for the more effectual preventing and puniſhing Clandeſtine and Unlawful Trading, which does not only tend to defraud the Publick, but prejudices the Fair Merchant, and diſcourages our own Manufactures.

There is nothing conduces more to the Encouragement of clandeſtine Trade than the Diſcouragement of the fair Dealer; for the Fortune of the one is built upon the Ruin of the other; 'tis the ſame in Trade as in Government: Where Knaves and ill Men are in favor and prefer'd, and Men of Probity and Honeſty diſcountenanced, that Government looks with a languid

languid and ſickly Aſpect. The Clandeſtine Trader is a Creature bound neither by the Laws of God nor Man he robs *Ceſar* of his due, and makes a Nullity of Human Laws; he ſacrifices his Soul, Conſcience, Honour, Reputation, and all that is dear to Mankind, to his inſatiable Avarice; while the Fair Trader languiſhes under Oppreſſion, and becomes a Sufferer by dealing honeſtly.

But what ſhall we ſay? Where lies the fault? Have we no Laws reſtraining Clandeſtine Trade? Yes, a great many; but what ſignify Laws if they are laid aſide by *Noli Proſequi*'s, Letters of Licence, or Orders of Compoſition from above? Theſe are Encouragements to the Clandeſtine Trader, while the Fair Merchant is haraſſed by perpetual Delays at the Cuſtom Houſe, by the irregular working at the Water-ſide, by the new Gimcracks and Methods introduced inſtead of Regulations in the Cuſtom-houſe, by the trouble they meet with in paſſing their Entries, attending many times ſeveral days together upon the Officers: theſe are all Hardſhips and Diſcouragements to the fair Dealer, while the Smuggler eaſes himſelf of theſe Perplexities, and the Payment of his Duties at the ſame time.

To illuſtrate the thing more plainly, I ſhall begin with the latter, and ſhow how the Innovations in the Cuſtom-houſe are a common Grievance and

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Perplexity to Merchants. After a Merchant has learn'd his Trade, he has one thing yet more difficult to underſtand, *viz.* the manner of paſſing his Goods at the Cuſtom-houſe, and paying the King's Duties; and by that time he is pretty well inſtructed in this Affair, come new Commiſſioners, new Laws, new Methods, and new Practices, and he is as much at a loſs as if he had never learn'd. I ſhall only touch a little at the Innovations lately made in the Cuſtom-houſe at *London*; for my Trade lying very little in the out Ports, my knowledg of their Management there is as ſmall.

In the year 1695, the Wharfingers belonging to the Keys adjoining to the Cuſtom-houſe enter'd into a Combination to bring all their Wharfs into one Intereſt, that by that means they might the better manage the Merchants to their own advantage, which ſucceeded to the no ſmall trouble of the Merchants. Out of this ſprang a Combination amongſt the Land-waiters and King's-waiters, which prov'd more fatal to the fair Trader than that of the Wharfingers. Theſe combined to leſſen the number of the Land-waiters: this Plot was under the care and management of ſeven Directors, and their Intereſt in this management was to have the working of all Ships to themſelves, with all the Profits thereby ariſing. At this time two or three

three of that Board being either dead or removed, they prevail'd upon the Commiſſioners (one part of which were new ones) to diſcontinue at leaſt thirty of thoſe they now call Key-men from their Employments, which was done ſeventeen days before the Lords of the Treaſury gave any Directions in that Affair; and they did this at a juncture when the greateſt *Virginia* Fleet that ever was known, join'd with a great Fleet from other Parts, arriv'd in the River: and how prejudicial this was to his Majeſty's Revenue, cannot be eaſily imagin'd; beſides the vaſt Credit of ſeveral thouſand Pounds was at this time given upon account of Poſt-Entries. Had ſome ſort of People enter'd into a more innocent Combination than this in the late Reigns, they would have been decently hang'd for their pains. It is at leaſt thirty years ago there were eighty Land and King's-waiters in the Port of *London*, when Trade was leſs conſiderable than now it is, and then thought few enough to diſcharge ſo weighty a Truſt.

Now let us a little conſider the Effects of this Combination; the Loſs thereby acruing to his Majeſty's Revenue, and the Trouble it brings upon the Fair Merchants. By former Inſtructions, no Officer was allowed to work without his Partner, nor to have more than one Ship at a time upon his hands; but

but ſince this Combination they have had ſix or ſeven Ships at a time, and one Officer has often work'd two or three Ships at once without his Partner, which renders them uncapable of doing either the King or Merchant Juſtice; and the fair Merchant for want of Officers cannot get his Goods aſhore, during which time the Intereſt of his Mony is loſt, his Time ſpent to no purpoſe, and perhaps for want of his Goods he loſes the Sale of them, which is worſe than all the reſt. See now the Keys all in a Confuſion, one Officer running from one Ship to another working both at one time, another ſtaring about him to find his Ships out, having ſo many he knows not half of them; here the Porters curſing and ſwearing, there the Merchants fretting and vexing for want of Officers: here is the moſt exact Picture of Diſorder and Confuſion; the diſorderly Crowd ſeem more like a Gang of *Babel* Bricklayers than regular Workers at the Keys. This hurry makes well for the Clandeſtine Trader, who has now an opportunity of doing his buſineſs, who, like the Pickpocket, carries on his Trade moſt ſecurely in a noiſy buſy Crowd. To corroborate this we may add, that very few Seiſures have been made ſince the aforeſaid Officers have been diſcontinued; for how can a Perſon that works alone, and perhaps upon two or three Ships at one time, have leiſure

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to examine Packs and Bales of Goods? ſo that Goods prohibited, or charged with a higher Duty, may paſs in ſuch Packs or Bales for want of inſpection. It is worthy Remark, that as ſoon as this Combination was detected, and the Combinators Books and Papers order'd to be ſent for, they had time enough given them to make away the Book of their Accounts, which contain'd the Particulars of their Diſburſements; for all Plots are carried on by Subſcription, and Mony rais'd for that purpoſe. Whether an Oath of Secrecy, as ſome have hinted, was adminiſtred or no I can't tell, but I underſtand that a Sum of Mony was laid in Bank for the Security of the Combination; and ſome have been heard to ſay they have been 20 *l.* out of Pocket towards the carrying on of the Deſign; and I am told one Article of the Combination was, that no Perſon, upon pain of divers Penalties therein mention'd, ſhould ask or inquire how the Mony was diſpoſed of, or to whom it was paid: which looks as if ſome Perſons of a higher rank than themſelves were in the Combination.

It would be worth enquiry to know to whom the Mony has been paid, and what Sums they have levied upon themſelves ſince the Commencement of the Combination; and ſuch a Power as that of your Houſe may command the original Inſtru-

ment of Combination to be laid before you, which I underſtand is yet in being. And I humbly conceive it a thing worthy your Notice to inquire into Matters of this nature; for a Combination that leſſens the King's Revenue, increaſes the Taxes upon the good People you repreſent; and what is loſt by this means, muſt be made good by additional Supplies from you. And 'tis a juſt Query, Whether thoſe Men who combine to leſſen the King's Revenue, would not do the ſame to ſhorten his Life? for taking away Life and Livelihood are very near akin.

Tho it is not much my buſineſs to enquire into the Managery of the Cuſtoms, any farther than it relates to the paſſing of Goods and payment of Duties, yet what lies in a Man's way he may better take notice of than ſtumble over it: It is certainly viſible to a very mean Capacity, that the Retrenchment of Officers at this time can be no ways ſerviceable to the King nor Merchants, when the increaſe of Trade requires an addition of many more. The abundance of Officers added in the long Room at the Cuſtom-houſe, is no Indication that any ſhould be diſcontinued upon the Keys: this Practice is obvious to no man's Reaſon, but muſt be left as a Riddle and Myſtery to be unfolded only by thoſe that have power to examine into it.

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The Lords of the Treaſury did indeed examine into the Affair, and thought fit to diſcharge *Colcheſter*, one of the Principals in the Combination: But this Combination is a Monſter of many Heads, and to take off one is juſt the cutting a Sucker from a Tree, which makes it grow the better; this is true in fact, for the Combination is ſtill in force, which appears by the viſible Effects of it, for the thirty Officers are ſtill diſcontinued, and the Merchant labours under the ſame Hardſhips. The diſcontinuance of theſe Officers was the effect of the Combination, which rationally demonſtrates that the Cauſe is not removed; if it were, the Effect would ceaſe.

But inſtead of puniſhing the Combinators, as a Terror to ſucceeding Officers that ſhould attempt any thing of this nature, two of them ſince that time have been preferred to be Surveyors, when at the ſame time it is generally noted that the Officers diſcontinued are Men of the beſt Characters in the Cuſtoms in relation to their knowledg in Buſineſs, and their Integrity and Affection to his Majeſty and Government. It could be wiſh'd that none but ſuch were imploy'd in the Cuſtoms; for the King's Intereſt would be better conſider'd, when the King's Duties are under the Care of ſuch Men as think themſelves bound by Prin-

ciples of Honeſty and Conſcience to do the King Juſtice.

But in this Office we have Men imploy'd that have paid double Taxes to the King as Non-jurors; and I remember ſome time ſince I read two Papers concerning one *Daſſel* a Land-waiter: one Paper recites an Order of Council for diſcharging the ſaid *Daſſel* from his Imployment for trading and correſponding with *France* during the War; and the other, two Acts of Parliaments expreſly prohibiting his being imploy'd in the Service of the Government for the future: and yet the ſaid *Daſſel* (notwithſtanding other Complaints againſt him in the Execution of his Office) is continued a Land-waiter to this very day.

I ſhould not, Sir, have enlarg'd ſo much upon the Subject of this Combination, could I have found out any way of redreſſing ſo great a Grievance but by the Power of Parliament. The weekly Obſervations of the irregular working at the Water-ſide are conſtantly laid before the Commiſſioners; the diſcontinued Officers complain, the Merchants complain, and the honeſteſt of the Land-waiters themſelves murmur at the multiplicity of Buſineſs they have on their hands: but all ſignifies nothing, for it ſeems the Merchants and King's Intereſt muſt both be ſacrificed to the greedy

Avarice

Avarice of a parcel of ſelf-intereſted Perſons.

And upon the whole, the Premiſes conſidered, may we not rationally conclude that this Combination ſubſiſts by the influence of ſome greater Perſons than the Combinators themſelves? In former days no ſuch thing was aim'd at, tho then there was more room for ſuch an Attempt than at this juncture, when the Increaſe of Trade requires an Addition of Officers; and how ill a thing muſt this ſeem to any diſintereſted Perſons, that the King's Intereſt ſhould be conſpir'd againſt, and deſtroy'd by Men that eat his Bread? Had ſuch a Retrenchment of Officers been for the King's Intereſt, the Lords of the Treaſury would have encouraged and not diſcharged *Colcheſter*; But the thing is condemn'd and exploded by all hands, yet kept afoot only for Reaſons beſt known to the Pocket of ſome body or other.

Should I mention the many other Abuſes in the Cuſtoms, as in the King's Ware-houſe, in the Ware-houſe belonging to the *Eaſt-India* Company, *&c.* I ſhould too far exceed the limits of a Letter, and ſhall therefore conclude with my Sentiments concerning the Cauſe of thoſe Irregularities.

Not only the Misfortunes of Nations and Governments, but of particular Perſons, often do ariſe from Intereſt and Avarice: From hence had the Combi-

Combination its undoubted Original: And by my Converſe with the Officers of the Cuſtoms I find moſt of them came in by Intereſt of Friends, without any farther Recommendation of Merit, or Teſtimonials of their Affection to the Government, or their Services to their Country. But becauſe they have ſerv'd in the quality of a Footman, Valet, or in any other Capacity to the Lords of the Treaſury, or are related to the Commiſſioners, or have had ſome other dependance upon them, therefore they are made Officers of the Cuſtoms. Now ſhould we Merchants manage our Stocks as the King's Revenue is manag'd, every week would produce at leaſt a Column of Advertiſements of Commiſſions of Bankrupt in the *Gazette*. If I have a Relation that is a Carpenter, I will imploy him to build my Houſe, but not to keep my Books: I will not ſend him my Factor into a Foreign Country, nor will I make him Super-cargo of my Merchandize; and certainly as great Care ought to be taken of the management of the Publick Revenue as of a Private Concern. Is a Perſon juſt come from cleaning of Shoes, and rubbing of Horſes heels, or carrying a Cloak, fit to be imploy'd in the management of ſo great a Concern? And are not Men of a ſervile Education (how fawning and creeping ſoever they may be to their Superiors and Benefactors) the moſt

moſt imperious and inſolent in the Execution of their Office?

Such Promotions as theſe ſeem at the very firſt view oppoſite to the King's Intereſt, for the ignorance of the Perſons employ'd can never fail of Miſcarriages; and if wilful Crimes are added to their Sins of Ignorance, no notice is to be taken of either, for they have Advocates at hand, whoſe Intereſt it is to bear them out in their Miſmanagements: And to complain againſt ſuch Men is beating the Air, and knocking Heads againſt Stone-walls.

I ſhall enlarge no farther, but ſince I have given you the Clue that leads into the *Maze* of the Cuſtom-houſe, ſhall leave the Improvement of the whole to your better Underſtanding, and remain,

Your moſt humble Servant.

FINIS.